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NEWSLETTER

102-1378

3 September 1992

Washington, D C

LABOR DAY. Every year the first Monday of September is set aside to commemorate Labor Day. Since the first parade observing Labor day back in 1882 more than a century has passed. In these years we have achieved so much as a nation, but most significantly we have demonstrated that we are a country that works. To what can our success be attributed? There can only be one answer, and that is the indomitable will and spirit of the American people whose sweat, toil and ingenuity have made our country so great -- truly the land of opportunity. It is that spirit which we celebrate this and every Labor Day. It is a special time to reflect on all that we have achieved, individually and as a nation. It is also a day to think about future goals for ourselves, for our families and for America. May Labor Day 1992 be a happy one for you and yours.

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A HELPING HAND. In these difficult economic times when a dollar doesn't go nearly as far as it once did, when community resources are stretched to the limit, and when more than ever there exists a need for neighbors to help neighbors, I thought it might be of interest to discuss some programs which effectively serve children and their families. I'm specifically referring to services offered by the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS). The following will provide highlights:

HEAD START. This is a highly successful early childhood development program for low-income children. It is based on the philosophy that a child benefits from a comprehensive, interdisciplinary program which fosters development and remedies problems through a broad range of services, and it accomplishes this by involving the child's family and community. Recent years have seen the largest expansion in Head Start's history allowing every eligible child whose parents want them to participate to receive at least one year of the Head Start experience prior to entering school. Since its inception in 1965, Head Start has provided educational, social, medical, dental, nutritional, and mental health services to more than 12.5 million children and their families across the country.

It was a real pleasure recently to speak at the groundbreaking of a new Head Start building in Donna which will have three classrooms and facilities for sixty children.

IMMUNIZATION. This is an effort which has greatly reduced the incidence of vaccine preventable diseases. In an effort to insure that at least 90% of our nation's children are fully immunized by the age of two, innovative and comprehensive approaches at the state and local levels are being supported by HHS. A 35% increase in immunization appropriations for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) from 1991 and 1992 allowed CDC to undertake demonstration projects to determine the feasibility of new approaches such as providing "express lanes" for vaccinations in public clinics, making vaccinations available in hospital emergency rooms, and making vaccinations available through the Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) programs.

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI) and OLD AGE, SURVIVORS AND DISABILITIES INSURANCE (OASDI). Financial support for children is provided by the Social Security Administration to millions of children through these two programs. SSI this year has provided hundreds of thousands of disabled and blind children from needy families with money for food, clothing and better housing. Approximately three million children are receiving OASDI benefits because of a deceased or disabled parent. Currently 98% of all children would be eligible for OASDI benefits if the working parent dies, and 80% would be eligible if the working parent becomes disabled.

CHILD WELFARE. These programs assist state public welfare agencies to provide services to dependent children and their families. The services include: prevention and intervention aimed at keeping children with their families, development of alternative placements such as foster care or adoption if a child cannot remain at home, and reunification services so that children can return home whenever possible. This current fiscal year almost \$274 million in formula grants is available to states to establish, extend and strengthen child welfare services. In addition, child welfare entitlement programs for foster care, adoption assistance and independent living will receive significant funds.

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT (CSE). This promotes family self-sufficiency by securing regular and timely child support payments. In Fiscal Year 1991, a record high of nearly seven billion dollars was collected in child support, providing payments in over three million cases.

AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN. This assists low-income families with dependent children to meet an immediate financial need and helps parents in these families to become economically self-sufficient.

MEDICAID. This is a federal/state health care program for the poor. Since April of 1990 this program has expanded eligibility for pregnant women and children up to age six with family incomes below 133% of the federal poverty level. Coverage for children up to the age of 19 with income levels below 100% of poverty is being phased in. Also being looked at is coverage for low income families below 150% of the federal poverty level not otherwise eligible. An additional demonstration project covers children up to the age of 20 and pregnant women who are below 185% of the federal poverty level.

MEDICAID'S EARLY PERIODIC SCREENING, DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT (EPSDT) PROGRAM. This has been expanded to now require that children be provided treatments for conditions discovered during a screening visit, regardless of whether such conditions are ordinarily covered by the state program. Health problems are diagnosed and treated early before they become more complex and their treatment more costly. Also, EPSDT providers are now required to perform lead blood level assessments appropriate to age and risk as part of routine screening. If lead poisoning is detected, Medicaid must cover the cost of the treatment. Other services provided include comprehensive medical and dental care including vision and hearing care, as well as health education programs. Maternal and infant health are improved by bringing more eligible pregnant women into risk specific health care and more infants into early health supervision.

As previously mentioned these are but some of the existing programs that are available and for which you might be able to qualify. If you have questions about them or would like more information let me hear from you.

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LOCAL ASSISTANCE. There is an excellent program in our area which I also want to mention this week. This is the **Rio Grande Valley Food Bank.** The food bank was originally organized back in 1983 to provide food for families in emergency situations. It is headquartered in McAllen and the services it provides are invaluable. Attesting to this is the fact that the operation has consistently grown since its inception and is now comprised of over 60 pantry outlets throughout South Texas. Last year alone over 3,000,000 pounds of food was distributed to approximately 40,000 families. That's a lot of food for a lot of people, and the food bank is certainly to be commended for its outstanding efforts.

These figures demonstrate just how great the need is that exists among people we see every day. While it is good to know that there are existing programs and services in place to help try and meet the bulk of these needs, each of us, too, must remember how important it is that we take the time to stop when we can and lend a hand. We can make a difference -- neighbor helping neighbor.

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